



Kate Edmundson
Interim Executive Director

LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

COMMISSIONERS:
CAROL O. BIONDI
PATRICIA CURRY
HON. JOYCE FAHEY
ANN E. FRANZEN
SUSAN F. FRIEDMAN
HELEN A. KLEINBERG, CHAIR
DAISY MA
DR. LA-DORIS MCCLANEY
REV. CECIL L. MURRAY
WENDY L. RAMALLO, ESQ.
SANDRA RUDNICK, VICE CHAIR
ADELINA SORKIN, LCSW/ACSW, VICE CHAIR
DR. HARRIETTE F. WILLIAMS

APPROVED MINUTES

The General Meeting of the Commission for Children and Families was held on Monday, **September 18, 2006**, in room 739 of the Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration, 500 West Temple Street, Los Angeles. **Please note that these minutes are intended as a summary and not as a verbatim transcription of events at this meeting.**

COMMISSIONERS PRESENT (Quorum Established)

Carol O. Biondi
Hon. Joyce Fahey
Ann E. Franzen
Susan F. Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg
Daisy Ma
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Wendy L. Ramallo
Sandra Rudnick
Adelina Sorkin
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

COMMISSIONERS ABSENT (Excused/Unexcused)

Patricia Curry
Rev. Cecil L. Murray

YOUTH REPRESENTATIVES

Jason Anderson
William Johnson

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

The agenda for the September 18, 2006, meeting was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- The minutes of the August 7, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

- The minutes of the August 21, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.
- The minutes of the September 5, 2006, general meeting were unanimously approved.

CHAIR'S REPORT

- On behalf of the Commission, Chair Kleinberg expressed appreciation to the Department of Children and Family Services' outgoing interim director, Joan Smith, thanking her for her leadership and steady hand, and wishing her success with her move.
- Commissioner Williams introduced her longtime friend Bettie Grandison, a retired supervising social worker for Alameda County.
- The Commission's sunset review report went before the Board of Supervisors on September 12, and all Commissioners have been contacted about their required ethics training.
- On September 28, the Department of Public Social Services' at-risk youth group will meet at the DPSS Pasadena district office to discuss gang issues with law enforcement personnel and other participants.
- If Commissioners are planning to attend the Partnership Conference on October 5, please contact Kate Edmundson or Elizabeth Hinton for registration information.

APPROVAL OF ELECTION PROCEDURES

The nominating process: the commission officers are chosen by majority, everyone has an opportunity to serve, Commissioner Fahey does this by speaking to them or emailing them. The nomination chair (Commissioner Fahey) will announce the results of the poll by identifying members who are interested in holding commission office, which we will do today. The announcement will take place at the commission meeting, immediately prior to the meeting at which the election will take place

On the day of the election, the nominating chair will announce the positions and the commissioners to be considered. Commission members will announce their decisions by ballots. A verbal tally of the results will be announced by the nominating chair. Ballots will be cast separately, one for the position of chair, one for the each of the vice-chairs.

Katie Fesler, County Counsel, clarified by saying "You actually have to go through and say Commissioner Bailey voted for this person for chair and this person for vice-chair—it has to be completely open...you have to do it orally, or in writing, and if done in writing, somebody has to read this person for chair and vice-chair."

Chair Kleinberg asked what harm it would do if one were to say 5 for so and so, and 6 for such and such and not have to name who voted for them. Ms. Fesler stated because it is mandated by the Brown Act to maintain an open process...

Commissioner Fahey added, “I will tell you that this is what we do at City Council, when we vote for anything, including commissioners who advise us and we are identified on record.”

Chair Kleinberg asked if we can eliminate the word ‘immediately’ on number 4? Katie responded by stating, “If you wanted to do it a little broader, that would be fine.”

Chair Kleinberg asked Commissioner Fahey if she would read out how number 4 will read. Commissioner Fahey stated, “The announcement will take place at a commission meeting prior to the meeting at which the election will take place.”

It was suggested that the election be held on October 2, but that happens to be Yom Kippur. The commission agreed to schedule the election on October 16, considering many people that would not be present on October 2.

Commissioner Fahey moved that the election procedures be adopted as amended, and Vice-Chair Rudnick seconded the motion. It was approved with one ‘no’ vote.

COMMISSION OFFICER ELECTION DATE

Because several Commissioners will be absent on October 2 in observance of Yom Kippur, **Commissioner Fahey moved that this year’s election of Commission officers take place on October 16. Commissioner Biondi seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.**

CHILD DEATH REVIEW

In the last month, ten children with current or prior DCFS cases have died as a result of gang-related activities. (Commissioner Biondi cited another 30 in 2006 alone.) Commissioners Friedman and Ramallo have looked into this disturbing trend and are concerned about what they see as two separate problems: a lack of departmental procedures for taking responsibility for these deaths—in only one instance was DCFS going to follow up—and the unavailability of information to Commissioners. Commissioner Ramallo expressed her frustration at the decision by County Counsel to restrict the information flow, arguing that Commissioners should be in no worse a position to receive the facts of cases than the press or members of the public. Confidentiality laws are in place to protect children, not the department or a commission. She also requested the inclusion of comprehensive, accurate information on death notices, since incorrect details can cast doubts on the quality of the department’s casework.

The fact that almost all of the deceased children received extensive family reunification or family maintenance services—sometimes for up to six years—points to the pendulum swing between child safety, which should always be the priority, and reunification, which has seen a greater emphasis in the past few years. Leaving youth to linger for years in unstable families can increase the likelihood of their being drawn into gangs, and flies in the face of the intent of the Adoption and Safe Families Act. Commissioner Ramallo urged a discussion with the department on developing a philosophy of parenting that

would look at the whole family. Vice Chair Sorkin recommended examining all child deaths, as the Commission did some years ago.

Commissioner Fahey suggested placing this item on the Commission agenda for further discussion. By law, the department cannot remove children simply because of their parents' lifestyle or habits, or because of the environment in which the child is being raised. How does it approach families who have clear gang connections through parents or siblings? Commissioner Williams agreed that the issue merits further discussion and asked that the Probation Department be invited to be part of the presentation; Supervisor Burke's office is also studying the topic. Commissioner Ramallo suggested that the Office of Independent Review, the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN), and DCFS be asked for the status of all child death reviews, their timeframes, and who's involved. Very young children often die as a result of substance abuse or domestic violence, and those patterns should be studied as well. The department is examining trends over the last three years, Joan Smith said, though in general, shootings do not occur as a result of abuse or neglect.

Commissioner Ramallo moved that the Commission formally establish a committee to evaluate the status of existing child death case reviews. Commissioner McClaney seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. Participating Commissioners include Commissioners Ramallo, Friedman, and Biondi. Jo Kaplan from the Probation Commission will be invited to attend, as will DCFS executive team members.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Effective September 20, longtime DCFS employee Trish Ploehn has been appointed the Director of the Department, the first to be promoted from within. On that date, Joan Smith will return to her chief deputy position until her departure at the end of the month. **Diane Wagner** will serve in Ms. Ploehn's former position on an interim basis.

RETREAT COMMITTEE REPORT

The Commission retreat will be held on October 30 at The California Endowment facility near Union Station. RSVPs from Commissioners are due today. The retreat committee is meeting again this week, and Commissioner Ma asked for feedback and ideas on the retreat structure and agenda.

PERSONNEL COMMITTEE REPORT

The personnel committee has reviewed resumes for the executive director position and Commissioner Murray will represent the Commission in the interview phase over the next couple of weeks. The Commission will then interview any viable candidates. Commissioner Rudnick thanked the Executive Office for its help during this process.

TITLE IV-E WAIVER

A leadership organization group (LOG) meeting on August 28 involved 100 departmental managers and 200 community stakeholders in reviewing recommendations for the waiver plan made by the four core work groups—prevention, reunification, kinship, and permanency. Mitch Mason distributed a 'waiver initiative crosswalk' document listing the 46

initiatives emerging from the LOG meeting and how they match work group themes and probation efforts. (At the behest of the Federal and state governments, the Probation Department was brought into waiver negotiations only at the end of March, very late in the process.) To winnow down the 46 initiatives to a more manageable number, the DCFS executive team requested an analysis of implementation factors: how much each would cost, what its impact would be, and how fast each could be brought up to speed. The 21 initiatives listed in the 'cost/impact/speed analysis' chart distributed by Mr. Mason all have a moderate to high impact; most can be implemented fairly quickly, and most will achieve their outcomes rapidly, though several are considered long-term ideas.

The draft plan, which was meant to ensure overarching strategies that could be tailored for individual, family, and community needs, is expected to remain fluid even after implementation begins. It was released on September 6 and feedback continues to come in. The overall reaction so far has been favorable, with some understandable concerns about Probation's capacity for collaboration given the delay in its involvement.

Alan Weisbart presented a chart showing the possible partners within county departments for each of the original 46 initiatives, noting that the Chief Administrative Officer's Service Integration Branch is studying where departmental services overlap. Mr. Weisbart also distributed a list of possible funding sources that can supplement waiver funds. Electronic copies of these documents will be provided to the Commission office, and Commissioners were asked to add partners and resources of which they are aware. Chair Kleinberg suggested adding partners to address economic development, drug and alcohol treatment, mental health, domestic violence, and other issues, being specific about where services are available and where they are not.

The waiver's Federal funding cap will be based on fiscal years 2001–2002, 2002–2003, and 2003–2004. The state has not yet decided on its funding cap, though the decision is in the hands of Kim Belshé, secretary of the California Health and Human Services Agency. The state has been notified that the county will need 30 days to finalize the plan following its receipt of that information. DCFS is working with the Probation Department to conclude its analysis of the waiver impact, which should be ready this week.

Mr. Mason assured Commissioners that, though the waiver plan does not yet contain this level of detail, culturally and linguistically competent services (for monolingual Spanish-speakers, as well as for the various Asian/Pacific Islander communities) will be incorporated. Details have not yet been identified for monitoring the visitation system, but the department will abide by the court's new visitation protocols and will ensure that visitation is available seven days a week to accommodate parent schedules. The waiver plan calls for increasing wraparound slots to 1,200, and Lisa Parrish said that the program's capacity is now at 600, with some pending cases. New providers are being phased in gradually, and 800 slots are planned by May 1, 2007. Increased community-based placement is included in the waiver plan, although more could be done to highlight it—placing children within their own neighborhoods and schools is a critical issue.

After comments from Commissioner Ramallo on the undetailed 'broad strokes' nature of the draft plan, Joan Smith confirmed that the department was using the template provided by the state, and its next steps would be prioritizing initiatives and costing them out, when the state's fiscal information is received.

Jitahadi Imara from the Probation Department distributed a 'IV-E waiver care and service continuum' document that listed outcomes for the collaboration between Probation and DCFS, along with strategic questions and responses. He thanked DCFS for the opportunity to collaborate across systems, saying that the waiver provides a context in which children, families, and neighborhoods can flourish. It will require a culture shift away from 'business as usual,' and will oblige Probation to focus on stepping up family function through research-based case management practices and programs. The potential cost savings include reducing both the placement population and the crossover populations shared with DCFS and/or the Department of Mental Health. No matter how much money is involved, however, such a fundamental shift in how the Probation Department approaches families will not be easy, but Mr. Imara is optimistic.

Commissioner Biondi mentioned the abundance of evidence-based research that has not yet been used to develop evidence-based practices, and asked how Probation's suitable placement program will interact with the overall cultural change. Nowhere does Probation work effectively with families, she said, and the assessment tool it currently uses is not strengths-based, but rather identifies risk factors that label youth forever after. Acknowledging that the culture needs to develop, Mr. Imara said that both discussions at the executive level and work across bureaus is underway. If a youth starts in juvenile hall and is transferred to a camp and then into the community, those should not be three different experiences with nothing linking them. Youth should be in camp only long enough for their treatment goals to be met, and enhanced case management needs to help them transition back into the community. Lower caseloads and additional training are needed, along with mechanisms to ensure more quality control and quality assessment. The current assessment tool does work, as it provides a look at the risk factors driving delinquency. Commissioner Biondi disagreed, contending that the tool is extremely subjective; she has seen it used in negative ways to prejudice people working with the individuals. Whatever the tool uncovers, the department seldom has programs available to respond—to substance abuse problems, for example. Mr. Imara conceded that a better job could be done, recommending renewed training on the assessment tool and better case work to determine what is driving a youth's substance abuse. Treatment and counseling must also be provided, Commissioner Biondi added.

Commissioner Ramallo thanked Mr. Imara for his honesty, agreeing that individual probation officers cannot be held accountable if the executive echelon does not provide them training. For the waiver to be successful, however, attention must be paid to issues at a far more rudimentary level for Probation than for DCFS. She cited the simple practice of probation officers failing to identify the family status of youth being released from camps. Children could have been removed from their parents at age five, but no one asks

and no one knows. Before release, probation officers must at the very least find out what their charges' relationships with adults are, and where they have a home.

Mr. Imara acknowledged the problems mentioned, saying that the waiver gives his department every opportunity to remedy them. Benchmarks must be set, focused trainings with skill-level outcomes must be provided, and a comprehensive, multidisciplinary assessment is needed that compiles the youth's history with the child welfare system, education, health, substance abuse, etc. Probation's part in the waiver plan is a work in progress, and stakeholder input will be solicited in a series of meetings with various commissions, families, youth, schools, and law enforcement. All well and good, Commissioner Ramallo said, but until the Probation Department identifies and triages the children it serves, any money spent will be wasted. "Start counting," she urged. If probation officers don't know who their kids live with, they need to pick up the phone and find out.

Especially because the waiver plan is for only a portion of the juvenile probation population (those in group homes, but not those in camps), Chair Kleinberg asked Mr. Imara to return to the Commission with a realistic estimation of where the department is starting and what it thinks it can accomplish for children already within the system, and where the dollars will come from for training, since the waiver has no provision for that. Mr. Imara gladly agreed, declaring that the essence of the waiver opportunity was for everyone to start by saying, 'I care about kids.'

Another issue, Chair Kleinberg said, is how individuals can learn the skills needed for successful parenting, and how parenting classes mandated by the court are generally considered ineffective. She suggested putting together a group with both departments and the community to talk seriously about this, and Mr. Imara suggested a discussion about the resources needed to prepare teens with few family ties for self-sufficiency.

EDUCATION

Lisa Parrish introduced Gail McFarlane-Sosa and **Patty Armani**, two-thirds of the DCFS education unit that has recently added **Norma Klein**. The unit has been involved with the implementation of the Education Coordinating Council's *Expecting More: Raising the Educational Achievement of Foster and Probation Youth*, and has found that blueprint a useful framework to focus various departments and agencies in joint efforts.

- Thanks to a court order allowing the sharing of confidential information, two data matches have identified the concentrations of DCFS and Probation children and youth enrolled in the Los Angeles Unified School District, and begun to analyze achievement scores and other information.
- As Commissioners heard from the Education Coordinating Council's presentation earlier this month, work is being started on a possible electronic education record.
- Half a million dollars has been identified to open five new academic mentoring centers—designed on the Foshay Learning Center model—at five middle and high

schools, with the goal of opening ten centers over the next two years at schools with the highest concentrations of system youth.

- An RFP was just released for education consultants—a credentialed teacher or a **PSA** counselor—for each of the 19 DCFS regional offices, to help change the culture to pay better attention to the education of foster children.
- In an attempt to discover how many DCFS youth were graduating from high school, the education unit requested a hand count from the 19 regional offices, about half of which responded. After culling students of graduation age who were still in school, this limited count indicated a 78 percent graduation rate, with 368 youth graduating. (Responses will be solicited again from the offices that did not reply.)

A hand count was necessary because social workers are not now required to complete the series of education fields in the state's CMS/CWS computer system, and education information is not systematically tracked. Any change to CMS/CWS takes at least two years to accomplish, and other changes have received priority. (The existing system does not, for example, track either the math or English portion of the high school exit exam now required by law.) Changes are being requested through various statewide organizations and by several other jurisdictions, but if completing those fields is made mandatory for social workers, workload issues will also arise. The electronic education record, if implemented, could make for a cleaner transfer of information, and San Diego County has made some progress in that arena.

Commissioners expressed concerns about a lack of tracking capabilities with regard to school issues, especially since truancy is a significant risk factor for gang activity.

Because one-quarter of DCFS's caseload is children under the age of four, Vice Chair Sorkin asked if the education unit was working with United Way's Success by Six program, ensuring that children are able to read, and also asked how many DCFS children are enrolled in Head Start or Early Head Start, a program that must, by Federal law, give priority to foster children.

In the interests of time, Chair Kleinberg asked representatives from the education unit to return for the balance of their presentation on October 16, and requested that they address education within the team decision-making process.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Marjorie Shelvy from the Legal Aid Foundation articulated her concerns about the Department of Public Social Services not being part of the Title IV-E waiver, since approximately half of DCFS children are from families dependent on CalWORKs or other supportive services. At a meeting she attended on September 7, neither representatives from DPSS's GAIN program nor those from CalWORKs knew anything about the waiver, and she urged their involvement.

MEETING ADJOURNED